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THE CHURCH
OF
THE MIDDLE AGES.



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THE CHURCH OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

A

S E R M O N,

Preached in the Church of St. Mary de Nodde,

GLOUCESTER,

MONDAY, MAY 8, 1837,

AT THE VISITATION

OF THE

VENERABLE JOHN TIMBRILL, D.D.

ARCHDEACON OF GLOUCESTER.

BY

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TO THE
VENERABLE JOHN TIMBRILL, D.D.
ARCHDEACON OF GLOUCESTER,
AND THE
REVEREND THE CLERGY
OF THE
DEANERY OF GLOUCESTER,
THIS SERMON
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

The Writer has found it impossible to commit this Sermon to the press without appending some Notes. He knows not whether he should apologise for their being so few, or so many. Should any complaint be made on the ground of their number, his excuse, which he cannot but think a very sufficient one, is the copiousness of the subject. If they are thought fewer than the text requires for its complete illustration, he can only say that he would have been glad to make them more numerous, but that he considered himself bound to answer the call of his Brethren without delay.

Gloucester, May 15, 1837.

A SERMON.

ST. MATTHEW xxviii. 20.

“LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO
THE END OF THE WORLD.”

The passage in connection with these words presents us with a very striking picture. A few poor and dejected men are gathered together in a solitary spot, in expectation of one whom they had learned to love and to venerate as a being more than human. Their mysterious visitor soon joins them, and they bow before him in speechless wonder. Great indeed is the contrast between those feeble doubting worshippers, and Him who “came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” It is, however, just the difference between man and God. In the one we see ourselves; in the other we see our Redeemer.

It was on this interesting occasion, when the Apostles exhibited the very exemplification of moral and physical weakness, and our Lord had asserted in the most emphatic words his attribute of omnipotence, that he solemnly gave them their

commission—"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." They might have pleaded their inability to undertake such a work in their own strength. He therefore¹ adds the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

We recognize in the command given by our Lord to the Apostles, the commission of an Apostolical Ministry in all ages. And this view of the words has been so often and so ably established, that it is quite needless on an occasion such as the one on which we are assembled, even to allude to the arguments by which it is supported. We regard the promise too, as intended to apply to the successors of the Apostles in the ministerial office, as well as to the Apostles them-

¹ Μὴ γάρ μοι τὴν δυσκολίαν, φησὶν, εἶπατε τῶν πραγμάτων· ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι μεθ' ὑμῶν, ὃ πάντα ποιῶν εὐκόλα. S. Chrysost. in loc. Tom. II. p. 551. Edit. Savil.

Μαθητῆυσται γὰρ αὐτοὺς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη κελεύσας, καὶ προειδὼς, ὡς Θεός, ὡς λογισμοὶ αναβαίνουσιν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, πῶς οἶόν τε ἔνδεκα ἄνδρας πένητας, καὶ εὐγλωττίας ἐστερημένους, πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην μεταβαλεῖν· ἔλυσε τὴν ἀμφιβολίαν, καὶ τὸ δέος ἐξέβαλεν, εἰρηκῶς, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. B. Theodoret. Interpret. in Jeremiæ cap. I. v. 8. Tom. II. p. 407. Edit. Schulze.

selves. For they equally stand in need of support, and they are servants of the same gracious Master.

Regarding, therefore, the words of the text in this light, and believing, as we do, that every word of God must have its fulfilment, we are certain that the Lord's promise has been accomplished. He has ever been with his Church.¹ He has never ceased to bless the work of his Ministers. He has always been present in the administration of the sacraments, blessing with supernatural powers the cleansing waters of Baptism, and communicating himself in the blessed Eucharist.² When his Ministers have

¹ "Quia veritas ipsa dicit iterum, *Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem seculi*, proculdubio erunt semper in Ecclesiâ, cum quibus ille sit, eruntque fortissimi ac robustissimi pugnatores Dei, adversum quos ille qui nunc ligatus est in abyso, solutus, totis viribus permittetur belligerare, quos divina gratia idoneos reddet adversum tam immanem bestiam dimicare, et victores de eâ existere." S. Agobard, de Privilegio et Jure Sacerdotii. Tom. 1. p. 138. Edit. Baluz.

² Ὁ αὐτὸς δὲ καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ τῆς κολυμβήθρας τοῖς πιστευούσιν ἀοράτως ἐφίσταται· αὐτὸς περιπτύσσεται τοὺς νεοφωτίστους ὡς φίλους καὶ ἀδελφούς· καὶ λέγει πρὸς αὐτοὺς, χαίρετε. αὐτὸς εὐφροσύνης καὶ χαρᾶς ἐμπύπληκτιν αὐτῶν τὰς καρδίας, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς. αὐτὸς τοὺς ῥυπάντας ἀποπλύνει τοῖς τῆς χάριτος νάμασιν. αὐτὸς τοὺς ἀναγεννωμένους χρίει τῷ μύρῳ τοῦ Πνεύματος. αὐτὸς τροφεὺς αὐτῶν γίνεται καὶ τροφή. S. Gregorius (Patri. Antioch. 570-594,) in Mulieres Unguentiferas, ap. Combefisii Nov. Auct. Bibl. PP. Tom. 1. col. 845. n.

proclaimed the tidings of salvation, and “taught that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, men should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,”¹ he has caused his word to come with power, imparting to it a living energy. And “where two or three have been gathered together in his name, there has he been in the midst of them.”²

We further believe that the promise is being accomplished still. We regard ourselves as going forth to our work supported by the presence of our Master. That, feeble though we be in ourselves, the power of God “is made perfect in our weakness.”³ That we are endued with the powers with which he has been pleased to intrust the Ministry for the edification of the Church. And that to us he will, in the exercise of his wisdom and goodness, vouchsafe his blessing.

But here I pause; for it would ill become any one standing in this place, on an occasion like the present, to substitute assertion for argument, or decline giving an answer to any fair objection that may be raised against our principles. We regard the text as affording the guarantee of the Saviour’s promise for the perpetuity of the Church. But it is objected, that in this sense it has not been fulfilled. That this is so far from

¹ Titus, II, 12

² Matt. XVIII, 20.

³ 2 Cor. XII, 9.

having been the case, that during a long course of ages, error and false doctrine overran what was called the Christian world, and utterly destroyed the simplicity of the Gospel. This objection threatens to remove from us one of the firmest warrants we can find in the sacred volume for support in the trials and difficulties of our ministry, and even brings into question the veracity of the Saviour. My present object, therefore, is, in dependence on Divine help, to attempt to meet it. I have chosen this as the subject of to-day's discourse, not because I am not fully aware of its difficulty; not because I am not conscious of the hazard to which it must be exposed in hands so feeble; but as having been led to deem it of urgent necessity that our attention should be directed to it in the present condition of the world and of the Church.

The members of the Church of England are, it must be confessed, very unfavourably situated for arriving at a proper estimate of the condition of the Church during the period usually denominated the Middle Ages. Enjoying as we do, by the gracious Providence of God, a purity of doctrine and a simplicity of worship truly apostolical, we are apt to look back to times less enlightened with contempt and prejudice. We are so deeply convinced of the scriptural truth of our creed, and the primitive character of our ecclesiastical polity,

and see them so well adapted to the wants of the human mind, and of the human heart, in the existing state of society, that we are little accustomed to look with indulgence upon the opinions which were current in ruder periods, or to reflect whether other states of society may not have had other wants. This state of feeling would alone be sufficient to make us unfair to the earlier Church. But there is another circumstance which has had a still more direct tendency to produce this effect. I mean our constant warfare with the Church of Rome. As that Church represents itself as identical with the Church of past times, and as it has been too commonly admitted by Protestant controversialists that it does actually correspond in faith and discipline with the Western Church of the Middle Ages, many of us have come pretty much to think, that in our controversy with Rome we are virtually contending with the Church of the period in question, and consequently regard it with suspicion and jealousy.

I may remark too, that the measure which has sometimes been dealt out to those who have entertained the more favourable opinion, has scarcely contributed to bring us nearer to a correct view of the subject. On the one hand they have been denounced as admirers of the spiritual despotism of an ignorant period; and on the other hand they have been suspected of a secret inclination to the

doctrines of Rome. But at all events, it is time for us, my brethren, to submit the whole matter to a serious and careful examination. If we are not prepared to lose the warrant of our Ministry, or to give up our Lord's promise as a signal instance of a prediction not fulfilled, it becomes us fairly and openly to meet the difficulty to which I have referred.

Our Lord promised that he would be with his Ministers "unto the end of the world;" and yet (we are told) during a long course of ages the Church was in grievous ignorance of the truth, and taught very dangerous errors. This is the difficulty,¹—which I have endeavoured to state forcibly and fully. The subject is evidently one that cannot properly be treated with brevity.² But it may perhaps be found possible to suggest in a few remarks, considerations which may tend to break the force of the objection. In the hope of effecting this I would remark—

¹ I would be understood as freely confessing my belief, that if the truth was not preserved in the Church, it was not preserved at all. The notion that it was preserved in *separated* communities can scarcely be regarded as any longer tenable. As to the Albigenses and Waldenses, the distinction between those sects, and the futility of the attempts to maintain the orthodoxy of the one, and the antiquity of the other, seem to have been fully established.

² "Habebit tamen in his lectoris mei curiosa vestigatio, etsi non copiam satietatis quâ delectetur, qualemunque tamen causam inquisitionis, quâ melius exerceatur." Walafridus Strabo de Rebus Ecclesiasticis. Bibl. PP. Tom. iv. col. 572. c. Edit. 1575.

I. THAT THE FACT WHICH IS ASSUMED TO MILITATE AGAINST THE LITERAL FULFILMENT OF OUR LORD'S PROMISE IS GREATLY OVERSTATED ; and

II. THAT ALLOWING TO A CERTAIN EXTENT THE TRUTH OF THE FACT ASSUMED AS THE OBJECTION, IT STILL CANNOT IN ANY SENSE BE REGARDED AS IMPEACHING HIS VERACITY.

In the first place, then, I humbly submit, that it may safely be maintained, that the representations which are commonly made of the state of the Church during the Middle Ages are unfair and overcharged. The peculiar position of the Anglican Church, to which I have already adverted, has concurred with modern arrogance and sciolism in producing a conventional estimate of the elder period of the history of the existing European nations, which those who have made any kind of acquaintance with the original sources of information know to be very far from correct. There is reason to think that the whole subject has been very greatly misunderstood and misrepresented. But no part of it has suffered more than that which relates to religion. For here additional agencies have been at work in producing and perpetuating error. The notions of individual critics with regard to the interpretation

of the prophecies,¹ have had very considerable influence in forming and modifying the opinion which generally prevails among us. And whole generations have grown up in false views of history, because a writer of note has perhaps left the straight path of literal interpretation, or mistaken the sense of a particular prediction.

The period which is represented as that of spiritual darkness and degradation is comprised in the thousand years which followed the extinction of the Western Empire.² Now, though it has been very common to speak of the whole of this long series of centuries as bearing the same general characteristics, and as deserving to be described in the same terms of opprobrium and contempt, a moment's reflection might lead any one to expect that the various divisions of it must differ very materially, and that the pecu-

¹ The attempts which have been made to establish a correspondence between the church of Rome and the prophecies relating to Antichrist, have probably done more than any thing else towards producing the current notions respecting the state of religion in the Middle Ages. The process which has been going on in perverting history and garbling documents to support this opinion, has been exposed by Mr. Maitland, in his writings on the 1260 days—especially in his first "Enquiry."

² A variety of circumstances have induced the writer to confine his remarks in this discourse entirely to Western Christendom. He trusts, however, that one whose studies have been chiefly among the later Greek theological writers, and who hopes hereafter to offer fuller proofs of the vitality of the Eastern Church, will not in the mean time be suspected of neglecting or undervaluing it.

liarities of one age could not be found to exist, in the same intensity at least, in another. And this is the fact. A mere glance at the records of Church-history is sufficient to convince us that the condition and spirit of different periods in the Middle Ages differ as they do in other times. For somewhat more than two centuries the Church maintained a doubtful conflict with the conquerors of the Western world, alternately enriched and despoiled by the superstition or violence of rude chieftains. Better times¹ succeeded when the earlier Carlovingians, who united the dignity of genius with military and political talents, had learned to respect the character of the Clergy, and to protect and encourage moral and intellectual worth. The great feudal aristocracy which was established under the later and more feeble monarchs of this dynasty, was little favourable to the prosperity of the Church. The Clergy were gradually accustomed to seek from the see of Rome the protection which they could not obtain from their native princes. The Popes at length came to exercise an acknowledged sovereignty. The schoolmen grew up to inculcate

¹ Lorenz's *Life of Alcuin*, which has recently been translated, contains much interesting information of a popular character respecting this period. But many of the German divines, even of the better class, still speak with so much levity and indistinctness on religious subjects, that it is often no easy matter to find out the objects with which they write, or the principles of the writers.

the theology, and the canonists to maintain and teach the laws, of Rome. But this was at the beginning of the thirteenth century. For it was only at this late period that the system of Papal dominion was fully developed.

Now it may be safely affirmed, that during the first and second of the periods I have marked in this rapid survey—that is, till the latter part of the ninth century—the doctrine of the Church remained very much what it had been in the days of Jerome and Augustine.¹ There were superstitions doubtless, (but this is a part of the subject to be noticed hereafter,) yet the substance of Christian opinion remained wonderfully uniform.² The Churches on the North of the Alps had all publicly recorded their disapprobation of image-worship³ in the course of the eighth and ninth

¹ Note A, in the Appendix.

² I say *wonderfully* uniform, in reference to the degree. But the fact was a natural consequence of the course of study pursued by all who studied at all. The ancient divines were implicitly followed as teachers, and imitated as models, by all who sought to obtain or to communicate theological knowledge. Towards the very end of the ninth century, Notker, surnamed the Stammerer, a monk of St. Gall, who died in 912, wrote to a friend recommending him a course of theological study. This tract affords a long list of ancient authors, but only five who wrote later than the time of St. Gregory, namely, Isidore of Seville, Rhabanus of Mayence, Bede, Alcuin, and Ladden; the last three natives of the British Isles. *Notatio Notkeri de Illustribus Viris*. ap. Fabricii *Bibl. Mediæ et Infim. Latinit.* Vol. v. 904—932.

³ Note B, in the Appendix.

centuries ; and towards the middle of the latter some of the most eminent writers of Christendom had vigorously opposed the novelty of transubstantiation.¹ In the following century perhaps, while the Northmen and Hungarians cruelly ravaged various provinces of the West, and an ambitious nobility, whose privileges and power rendered them so many independent rulers, stripped the Church of its property, and diverted ecclesiastical institutions from their legitimate objects, error was on the increase—though piety put forth some of its fairest blossoms and bore some of its richest fruits.² The eleventh century too witnessed an opposition to false doctrine.³ And if towards its close the claims of the Papacy were generally acknowledged, we must remember that such was the state of the times, that the establishment of an ecclesiastical monarchy, though a manifest violation of its original con-

¹ The book of Paschasius Radbertus (Abbot of Corbie) “*de corpore et sanguine Domini*,” written in 831, is allowed to have been the earliest exposition of the Romish doctrine. The views which it advocated were expressly opposed by Rhabanus Maurus, (Archbishop of Mentz,) Ratramne, (a monk of Corbie,) and our countryman, Joannes Scotus Erigena ; and incidental expressions of several other writers of the century shew that transubstantiation was not then the received doctrine of the Church.

² I would here make a general reference to the papers on the *Dark Ages*, which during the last two years have appeared in the British Magazine.

³ I allude to the controversy with Berengarius.

stitution, undoubtedly afforded present relief and safety to the Church.¹

In the middle of the twelfth century, "the last of the Fathers"² was called to his rest, and the Schoolmen then became the doctors of the Church. From that era the current theology rapidly tended towards the form presented by the modern doctrines of Rome. Still, however, there were few barriers³ raised against the possibility of a return to a Scriptural model. It was the social corruption, and those irregularities of the Clergy that were in so great a degree to be attributed to the Romish system now in full activity, which formed the great scandal of Christendom. The mendicant Orders—an invention of the adherents of the Papacy, not the native growth of any national church—spread superstition and ignorance among the vulgar ; while the rise of modern literature,⁴

¹ The great error of the adherents of the church of Rome has been in consecrating abuses. In mistaking a particular position of the church for its natural condition. The papacy was during a certain period an instrument of good. Like the dictatorship, it was salutary in its season—a tyranny when made perpetual.

² St. Bernard (Abbot of Clairvaux) died in 1153. The "Master of the Sentences," (Peter Lombard, Bishop of Paris, 1159—1164,) was therefore his contemporary.

³ Field, of the Church. Book III. chap 7, and Appendix to Book III.

⁴ It is well for it to be distinctly borne in mind, that the march of intellect, though proceeding in our own times under peculiar circumstances, is no novelty. It commenced certainly as early

and, somewhat later, the enthusiastic study of the ancient classics among the higher and more learned classes of society, tended to draw off men's minds from religion altogether. It was not, however, till the German Reformation had shaken the whole fabric of the Papal ascendancy, and the church of England had reasserted her independence of foreign domination, that the Romish party took the last fatal step, and intrenched itself in an unsocial and schismatical position, from which it would almost seem that it cannot be dislodged but by some signal interference of the providence of God.

So much then for the first consideration, namely, that the state of the Church during the middle ages is generally misapprehended.

II. I now come to the second position I ventured to lay down, namely, that allowing (as I freely do,) that the Church was during that long interval greatly under the influence of superstition and error, this was not the case to such a degree, or in such a way, as to involve any violation of the promise contained in the text.

as the thirteenth century. No one doubts the acuteness and industry of the early Schoolmen, who were in their way as much men of a "movement" as the German Rationalists. Italy, at all events, before the end of that century, possessed a national literature. Dante was born in 1235. And in the following century, Boccaccio and Petrarca, and Chaucer too, were, in thought and feeling, moderns.

In all inquiries of this nature we ought constantly to remember, that it is absolutely impossible for us to determine what quantity of gospel truth is necessary for salvation, and that we are quite unable to decide what amount of error is compatible with the soul's eternal safety. The whole tenor of Scripture leads us to conclude that what God regards in man is not the extent of his knowledge, but the sincerity of his faith; and that when the soul has cordially received the revealed truth, whatever it may be, which is made known to it, it is in a justified state, and has a personal interest in the mercy of the gospel.¹ "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh in this wise." . . . "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."² Ignorance and error are part of the lot of man in his present state of degradation. At the best, "we have the treasure" which God has imparted "in earthen vessels."³ The analogy of Scripture would lead us to think that there has never been a Saint, however great his knowledge and holiness, who has attained on earth a full conception of the whole scheme of

¹ "Nihil periculi, vel damnationis inest his, qui sunt in Christo Jesu, ab ipso illuminati per fidem." Thom. Aquin. Secunda 2æ. q. 2, ar. 3.

² Rom. x. 6, 9.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

salvation. We commonly judge upon this principle of those around us. We make allowances for those who differ from what we believe to be the truth, on the ground of the imperfection of the human understanding, and because we think that certain dangerous errors and practices are still compatible with sincerity and the love of truth. Let us carry this charity with us in our inquiries into the past history of the Church, and be equally candid in estimating the errors of an opposite character¹ to those on which we are so ready to look with indulgence.

The Church was set up as the pillar and ground of the truth. The faith and the inspired documents to which in the providence of God the faith was committed, were consigned to its keeping. And so far as relates to its fidelity to this solemn trust, the promise of God is pledged for its indefectibility. Now the faith² committed to the Church was evidently the great fundamental truth, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses

¹ Note C, in the Appendix.

² "This is then the foundation whereupon the frame of the Gospel is erected; that very Jesus whom the Virgin conceived of the Holy Ghost, whom Simeon embraced in his arms, whom Pilate condemned, whom the Jews crucified, whom the Apostles preached, he is Christ, the Lord, the only Saviour of the world: *other foundation can no man lay.*" Hooker, Discourse of Justification, § 23, Works, vol. III. p. 454. Edit. 1820.

unto them." 'This was "the word of reconciliation" which under the Gospel God committed to his ministers. And this the Church has ever faithfully preserved.¹ The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation she has ever maintained inviolate. Just as the Jewish Church, in spite of all its transgressions and corruptions, did its office in preserving the knowledge of the unity of God: so the Christian Church has under all the circumstances of its history, maintained the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. Through the times of the greatest darkness she has confessed the faith in the very same terms as we do. The three creeds have, ever since they were first employed, distinctly exhibited the doctrines of the Church. This is surely a signal proof of the Saviour's presence. For the greater we suppose the ignorance and corruption of the Middle Ages, the more difficult must it have been to preserve soundness of doctrine in the most mysterious subjects of Christianity.

Well, but you allow that there were errors—

¹ "Dixit Dominus Christus, *prædicabitur Evangelium in universo mundo*, an non perductum est ad exitum? Item illud: *et porta inferi non prævalēbunt adversus Ecclesiam*, id est, adversus fidem nostram, an hoc falsum extitit? an non extiterunt plurimi heresiarchæ, tyranni potentissimi, et Reges impii, qui fidem oppugnarunt, neque tamen potuerunt vincere eam, et extinguere?" Anastasius Abbas contra Judæos, ap. Canisii *Lectiones Ant.* Edit. Basnage. Tom. ii. P. iii. p. 15.

yes, undoubtedly, serious and pernicious errors. There was much superstition, much ignorance, and consequently much error. The imagination got to have too much scope in holy things. Opinions of uninspired men, and perversions of scriptural truths, gradually came to be regarded as part of Christianity. The superstitious practices of enthusiasts were admired and imitated. An extravagant veneration for the sacraments tended to produce, what at last it did abundantly produce, false doctrine and formality. We allow all this. Yet we still believe that Christ was with his Church¹ and his Ministers. For why might he not be? Surely he did not promise, when he engaged to be with them to the end of the world, that the outward condition of society should continue unchanged. He did not promise that mankind should maintain the same degree of civilization. But it is quite clear that all changes affecting the condition of society must have more or less influence on the Church. What grew up within the Church, was the natural result of what was going on without. For the Church to have maintained an uniform position in intelligence and sound doctrine, the state of society must have remained uniform too. We cannot help seeing that the one could not but have affected the other. As society

¹ Note D, in the Appendix.

passed from the state in which it existed under the Roman Empire, and assumed that form of greater simplicity which it bore through the greater part of the Middle Ages, it was inevitable that so great a change should tell upon the Church. Men in whom the imagination predominated over the intellect, who were affected more by feeling than by reasoning, craved after something more material and sensible than what was supplied by the letter of revelation, and they gradually adopted the growth of their own hearts as part of the substance of their religious opinions. This was just what was to have been expected. It was after all, very much what had come to pass in the divinely constituted "commonwealth of Israel." Unless God had made such changes in his providential government of the world as would perhaps have interfered with man's free-agency, we see not how it could have been otherwise. The facts I have conceded cannot fairly be urged against the fulfilment of our Lord's promise, because his promise only engaged him to preserve the fundamental principles of the gospel, and to make them of practical efficacy on the human heart.

I have hitherto supposed the corruptions which grew up in the Church during the period we have in view, the natural effect of known causes, and regarded them as being counteractive, so to speak,

of the purposes intended by the Divine Author of Christianity. I might perhaps safely go a step further, and ask if there is not reason to think that they were made the means of producing most important good? Nations in the condition in which the inhabitants of Western Europe were during the times in question, needed much visible recognition of spiritual truths; and the very errors of the Church tended to cover the face of the earth with the outward marks of religion. It is not easy to see how they could have been preserved from absolute barbarism but by the controlling influence of the priesthood; and minds such as theirs would have been little likely to yield to this moral power but at the call of superstition. Heathen tribes were to be converted; and we have been taught by our own experience, that unless Omnipotence visibly interfere, *that* is an object not easily or speedily accomplished, when Christianity is presented to them in its native purity, and is recommended to them merely by moral suasion. As we cannot see how in the usual order of the Divine government, the state of religion could have been otherwise than it was during the Middle Ages, so we ought to be cautious how we venture to pronounce that it was desirable that it should have been otherwise. Let us take care that we do not rashly assail a great and important chapter

in the history of God's dealings with our species. He who gave the Gospel, surely best knew, how it would most effectually promote the benefit of mankind.

To doubt that the Gospel was at work even in the most corrupt periods of those times, is not only to close our ears against the testimony of contemporary history, but to shut our eyes to what we might see around us. The writings of contemporary annalists and biographers abound with the most beautiful instances of the triumphs of Divine grace. And when kings, and priests, and penitents, yea and books too, have passed away,—their good deeds are fresh and blooming still. Our fairest temples and our noblest charities are most of them due to the worst portion of those times—I mean the later portion—when the march of improvement was fast bearing down the simplicity of the earlier period. And what is of still greater importance to us, it was then that Christianity sunk so deep into our institutions and legislation, that it would require the hand of violence to uproot it. While, therefore, we are thankful to the gracious Giver for our greater privileges, let us keep up in our hearts “the communion of saints,” by entertaining a grateful sense of what we owe to the ancient Church!

But I have trespassed quite long enough upon your attention. My brethren, we live in unusual

times—in times of great excitement. I make not allusion to the fact as intending to recur to any exciting topic of present interest. It has been a gratification to me to have been able to select a subject for my discourse that is little of kin to our every day matters of communication. It is ever a privilege to be able to travel away from the turmoil of the present into the dignified stillness of the past. But let us not return unimproved. We need all the comfort and all the wisdom we can gather for our support and guidance. And there is much, very much, to instruct us, both in the fidelity with which the Lord has observed his promise, and in the corruptions which have been allowed to mar the beauty of the Church. While the words of the text shine brightly on the page of revelation we cannot want consolation. The Church is founded upon a rock; and it is unbelief to doubt the gracious promise, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

We have seen that the chief danger of the Church is in not adhering to ancient and Scriptural principles, but in taking up the feelings of the times and in working them into religion. Let it be our care to search out and abide by the great fundamental principles of the Gospel—to cling to the truth which is taught in the word of God: and where there is any doubt about its

interpretation, to employ the noble canon of receiving "what has been always, and universally, and everywhere received in the Church."¹

Perhaps one of the most important lessons we learn from inquiries of this nature is, the danger there is in *excessive* opposition even to obvious corruptions. There are many of the errors of the Church of Rome that are but exaggerated representations of acknowledged truths. Many spring from valuable and important principles. Let us take care that we do not push our opposition too far.² Let us take care that while we attempt to

¹ Cùm sit perfectus Scripturarum canon, sibi que ad omnia satis, supérque sufficiat, quid opus est ut ei ecclesiasticæ intelligentiæ jungatur auctoritas? Quia videlicet Scripturam sacram pro ipsâ sua altitudine non uno eodémque sensu universi accipiunt; sed ejusdem eloquia aliter atque aliter alius atque alius interpretatur; ut penè quot homines sunt, tot illinc sententiæ erni posse videantur.— In ipsâ item catholicâ Ecclesiâ magnoperè curandum est, ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est. Hoc est etenim verè propriè que, catholicum (quod ipsa vis nominis ratió que declarat) quod omnia ferè universaliter comprehendit. Sed hoc ita demum fiet si sequamur universitatem, antiquitatem, consensionem. Sequemur autem universitatem hoc modo, si hanc unam fidem veram esse fateamur, quam tota per orbem terrarum confitetur Ecclesia. Antiquitatem verò ita, si ab his sensibus nullatenus recedamus, quos sanctos Majores ac Patres nostros celebrasse manifestum est. Consensionem quoque itidem, si in ipsâ vetustate, omnium Sacerdotum pariter et Magistrorum definitiones sententiâsque sectemur. Vincent. Lerin. Commonit. p. 317, 318. Edit. Baluz.

² Qui unice de fugiendo errore sollicitus est, tantumque hujusmodi studio insistit, ut veritati ipsi fidem adungere nêget, aut illam

cut away the excrescences, we do not wound the precious substance to which they have adhered. If any of us are called to controversy, let us be careful in the choice of our weapons, and jealous over ourselves that we engage in a right spirit.¹ There is no real good to be effected for any cause by loose charges and ignorant or half-learned declamation, by passionate extravagance and ill-digested arguments.² We can expect to be useful in this field only when we possess an intimate and extensive acquaintance with the subjects in dispute, and contend for the faith in a sincere and honest love of truth.

It must be quite unnecessary for me to remind

sibi insectandam sumat, ubique fallaciam sibi metuens: aliâ quidem viâ impingit, sed tamen impingit in errorem. Dubitare autem possumus, utri miseriores sint, an qui errorem contrahunt ob cautionis defectum; an qui veritatem repudiant ob ejusdem cautionis excessum. Muratori, de Ingeniorum Moderatione in Religionis Negotio. Lib. 1, c. 2, p. 14. Edit. 1779.

¹ Hujus adventui plenum expectationis obsequium præbeamus. Nec defendi ante Dominum servi irreligiosâ et inverecundâ festinatione properemus. S. Cyprianus, de bono Patientiæ, p. 220. Edit. Oxon.

² Tam sollicitè, cautèque veritas investiganda, atque prodenda est, ut Christianæ simul Caritatis, ut modestiæ, ut justitiæ maxima ratio habeatur. Quamobrem maledictis, et conviciis perpetuo abstinendum, calumniæ non segnius, quam pestis fugiendæ; hominem gravem ars mimica, virulentæ irrisiones, declamationesque, minime decent; in errores verò potius, quàm in errantes dimicandum; tibi, vel quùm triumphas de errore deprehenso, exuenda omnis ambitio. Muratori, in opere suprâ citato, lib. III. c. 14, p. 577.

you, my Reverend Brethren, that it is our obvious duty to seek diligently the information¹ which may qualify us “to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us,”² and that we have solemnly devoted ourselves to the work of providing our flocks with the bread of life. But whatever degree of proficiency we may attain in professional studies, may He “who alone worketh great marvels” enable us all faithfully to preach the Gospel—to teach our people to rest their hopes of salvation on the one foundation, Jesus Christ, to look for the preventing and assisting help of the Holy Spirit, to live in prayer, to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”³ Above all, may He make us such in our lives, that we may in our measure be able to say to them with the Apostle, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”⁴

To you, my brethren of the laity, I will only say, that we anxiously desire your love, your confidence, your co-operation. God allows you the honour of greatly helping us in our work. Without disturbing ecclesiastical order, all may assist in making known the Gospel of Peace. Honourable as it is publicly to proclaim the truth, it is not less excellent to benefit our fellow men

¹ Note E, in the Appendix.

² 1 Pet. iii. 15.

³ Tit. ii. 10.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

by our holiness and our prayers.¹ May we all preach by our lives ! May the Holy spirit cause the light of faith to burn brightly in us, and may we “ let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven,”² and confess that with us at least is fulfilled the Saviour’s promise, “ Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

¹ Καλὸν τὸ διὰ λόγων ὠφελεῖν τοὺς πυνθανομένους· κρεῖσσον δὲ, τὸ δι’ ἀρετῆς καὶ προσευχῆς συνεργεῖν αὐτοῖς· ὁ γὰρ διὰ τούτων ἑαυτὸν προσφέρων τῷ Θεῷ, βοηθεῖ καὶ τῷ πέλας διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου βοηθήματος. S. Marcus Eremita, ap. Bibl. PP. Græcolat. Tom. 1. p. 896. A. Edit. 1624.

² Mat. v. 16.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A, p. 19.

It would be very unreasonable to hope to establish the view here adopted by exhibiting a number of extracts from writers of the period. But I cannot forbear taking advantage of the opportunity to introduce a few passages which many excellent persons would little expect to find in writers of the ninth century. “*Inter hæc omnia caveat fidelis, ne omnino vel in modico in propriis viribus præsumat, sed de Dei adjutorio, ut ad finem bonorum pervenire, vel in bono possit opere perdurare: quia Dominus ait: Sine me nihil potestis facere. Et Apostolus; Deus est qui operatur in vobis et velle et perficere pro bonâ voluntate. Et iterum: Gratiâ salvi facti estis per fidem, et hoc non ex vobis. Et iterum: Non quod idonei simus cogitare aliquid a nobis quasi ex nobis, sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est. Et Dominus: Nemo potest venire ad me, nisi Pater, qui misit me, traxerit eum. Multa Deus facit in homine bona, quæ non facit homo; nulla verò facit homo bona, quæ non Deus præstet ut faciat homo. Suam namque voluntatem homines faciunt, non Dei, quando id agunt quod Deo displicet. Quando autem ita faciunt quod volunt ut divine serviant voluntati; quanvis volentes agant quod agunt, illius tamen voluntas est à quo et preparatur et jubetur quod volunt. Tales nos amat Deus, quales futuri sumus ipsius dono, non quales sumus nostro merito. Sua bona Deus prævidet, præscit, adjuvat, et remunerat in nobis. Nemo bonus nisi solus*

Deus, qui non est alterius bono bonus. Homines autem, non proprio, sed Dei bono, sunt boni ; qui est fons et origo bonitatis ; immo qui est bonitas, a quo omne bonum, et sine quo nihil boni." S. Agobardus, (Archbishop of Lyons, 816—840,) de Fidei Veritate, c. xiii. Opera, Tom. ii. p. 22, 23. Edit. Baluz. "Subtiliter igitur expendat fidelis examinador et pius, quanta fuerit hominis iniquitas, quam nec quisquam hominum, nec quilibet angelorum, nisi Dei solius sanguis valuit expiare. Nec se mereri aliud quam supplicium credat homo, qui post purgationem baptismatis, quâ etiam parvulis regni cœlestis janua aperitur, tametsi quedam digna veniâ suspicatur se gessisse magis quam novit. Multa sunt tamen plura, super quibus divini judicii severitatem formidet. Quamquam etiam de bene gestis timendum est, cum tantus vir dicat, *omnes justitiæ nostræ quasi pannus menstruatæ*. Justitia enim nostra, licet interdum coram hominibus splendeat opere et sermone, in conspectu Dei sordescit pravâ cogitatione." Servatus Lupus (Abbot of Ferrières, 842—862) de tribus quæst. ap. Sirmondi Opera. Tom. ii. col. 950. A. Edit. Venet. "Nullus tollit peccata, nisi ille de quo dictum est, *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi* : cui nullum bonum hominis impossibile, nullum malum est insanabile. Quomodo autem Apostolus Petrus ostendit qui ait, *Non corruptibilibus argento vel auro redempti estis de vanâ vestrâ conversatione paternæ traditionis, sed pretioso sanguine quasi igni incontaminati et immaculati Christi*." Florus Magister (Deacon of Lyons, 852.) de Missâ. in Bibl. PP. Tom. iv. col. 660. D. Edit. 1575.

NOTE B, p. 19.

The Council of Frankfort, (794,) in its second Canon, (Concil. Labbe, Tom. vii. col. 1057. D.) condemned the second Council of Nice, which in 787 had established the worship of images in the Eastern Church. The Church of England had already taken the same line of conduct. "Anno 792, Carolus rex Francorum misit synodalem librum ad Britanniam, sibi a Constantinopoli directum, in quo libro (heu prohi dolor) multa inconvenientia, et veræ fidei contraria reperiebantur ; maximè, quòd penè omnium orientalium

doctorum non minus quam trecentorum, vel eo amplius episcoporum unanimâ assertionem confirmatum fuerit, imagines adorari debere, quod omnino ecclesia Dei execratur. Contra quod scripsit Albinus epistolam ex autoritate divinarum scripturarum mirabiliter affirmatam; illamque cum eodem libro ex personâ Episcoporum, ac principum nostrorum regi Francorum attulit." Rogeri de Hoveden Annal. ap. Scriptores post Bedam. And the Council of Paris, (824,) which also condemned image worship, thus complained of the conduct of the see of Rome: "Maximum vobis in eo obstaculum erat, eo quod pars illa, quæ debebat errata corrigere, suâque auctoritate hujusce superstitionis errori obniti, ipsa prorsus eidem superstitioni, non solum resistere, verum etiam incautâ defensione contra auctoritatem divinam et SS. Patrum dicta nitebatur suffragari." Synod. Paris. ad Ludov. et Lotharium Imp. It is proper to state, that as I have not at present access to the collections of Goldastus, (Imperialia Decreta de cultu Imaginum,) or Mansi, (Concil. Tom. xiv.) I have copied the last extract from Dr. Gieseler. Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte. 2en Bandes Erste Abtheilung, s. 80. Bonn, 1831. Agobard, who, according to his editor, the learned and moderate Baluze, only spoke the sentiments which were then universally entertained in France, (Not. ad Librum de Imag.) thus plainly expressed his opinion: "Quicumque aliquam picturam, vel fusilem sive ductilem adorat statuum, non exhibet cultum Deo, non honorat angelos, vel homines sanctos, sed simulachra veneratur. Agit hoc nimirum versutus et callidus humani generis inimicus, ut sub prætextu honoris sanctorum, rursus idola introducat, rursus per diversas effigies adoretur; ut avertat nos ab spiritalibus, ad carnalia verò demergat; ac per omnia simus digni ab Apostolo audire: *O iusensati, quis vos fuscinarit?*—Nec iterum ad sua latibula fraudolenta recurrat astutia, ut dicat se non imagines sanctorum adorare, sed sanctos. Clamat enim Deus: *Gloriam meam alteri non dabo, nec laudem meam sculptilibus.*—Si autem aliquis homo adoratur, vel angelus, præter eum qui et Deus et homo et summi esse consilii angelus, Prophetâ testante, perhibetur, non est aliud nomen quod sit vel super hoc nomen quod est super omne nomen, aut æquale illi. Sed quia nullus Deo æqualis, nullus alius essentialiter Jesus, id est, Salvator, existit, credamus Apostolo, cedamus divina auctoritati; flectamus genu in nomine solius Jesu, quod est super

omne nomen ; ne si alteri hunc honorem tribuimus, alieni judicemur à Deo, et dimittamur secundùm desideria cordis nostri ire in adinventionibus nostris." Liber de Imaginibus. Tom. I. p. 264, 267.

NOTE C, p. 24.

Though the remarks here made have no immediate reference to the present church of Rome, I cannot forbear quoting the following passage. "Upon this very point (that we acknowledge an honest ignorant Papist may be saved) you and your like work upon the advantage of our charity, and your own want of it, to abuse the weak. For thus I am told you work upon them. 'You see the Protestants (at least many of them) confess there may be salvation in our church ; we absolutely deny there is salvation in their's : Therefore it is safer to come to our's, than to stay in their's ; to be where almost all grant salvation, than where the greater part of the world deny it.' This argument is very prevailing with men that cannot weigh it, and with women especially, that are put in fear by violent (though causeless) denying heaven unto them.—But though this argument prevails with the weak, yet it is much stronger in the cunning, than the true force of it. For all arguments are very moving, that lay their ground upon the adversaries' confession, especially if it be confessed and avouched to be true. But if you would speak truly, and say, 'Many Protestants indeed confess, there is salvation possible to be attained in the Roman church ; but they say withal, that the errors of that church are so many (and some so great, as weaken the foundation) that it is very hard to go that way to heaven, especially to them that have had the truth manifested ;' the heart of this argument were utterly broken." Conference with Fisher. §. 35, p. 185, 186. Edit. 1686.

NOTE D, p. 26.

"They are not all faithless that are weak in assenting to the truth, or stiff in maintaining things opposite to the truth of Christian doctrine. But as many as hold the foundation which is precious,

though they hold it but weakly, and as it were with a slender thread, although they frame many base and unsuitable things upon it, things that cannot abide the trial of the fire; yet shall they pass the fiery trial and be saved, which indeed have builded themselves upon the rock, which is the foundation of the Church. If then our Fathers did not hold the foundation of faith, there is no doubt but they were faithless. If many of them held it, then is therein no impediment, but many of them might be saved." Hooker, Discourse of Justification. § 14. Works, vol. III. p. 442. Afterwards he goes on to show that they did hold the "foundation."—But even the testimony of Hooker is of less importance for the purpose for which I cite it, than the following very remarkable passage of the great Saxon Reformer. Luther thus expresses himself on this very subject in his letter on the opinions of the Anabaptists. Vol. IV. p. 375, of the Altenburg edition of his Works. "Wir bekennen aber, dass unter dem Paps-tumb viel Christliches gutes, ja alles Christlich gut sey, und auch daselbst herkommen sey an uns: Nemlich, wir bekennen, dass im Pampstumb die rechte heiliche Schrift sey, rechte Tauffe, recht Sacrament des Altars, rechte Schlüssel zur Vergebung der Sünde, recht Predigamt, rechter Catechismus, als zehen Gebot, die Artickel des Glaubens, das Vater unser." Of which the following translation is as literal as I can make it. "We acknowledge however, that under the Papacy there is much Christianity, yea all Christianity, and moreover that the same is thence derived to us: That is to say, we acknowledge, that in the Papacy there is the true Bible, true Baptism, true Sacrament of the Altar, true keys for the remission of sins, true office of preaching, true catechising, for instance the Ten Commandments, the Articles of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer." Surely I need no other apology for what some perhaps may deem excessive charity.

NOTE E, p. 33.

"Data est vobis quædam urbs propria, cives religiosi, in quâ si concorditer et spiritualiter, Domino præstante, transigitis, cœlestis jam patriæ præfiguratione gaudetis. Nolite amare desidiâ, quam Domino cognoscitis odiosam. Præsto vobis sint Sanctarum Scrip-

turarum instrumenta dogmatica cum expositoribus suis, qui veri sunt floriferi campi, cœlestis paradisi poma suavia, unde et fideles animæ salubriter imbuantur, et linguae vestrae non caduco, sed fructifero nimis instruantur eloquio. Quapropter desideranter introite mysteria Domini, ut sequentibus iter indicare possitis, quia magnæ verecundiæ pondus est habere quod legas, et ignorare quod doceas." Cassiodor. Institut. Divin. Lectionum, c. 32. ap. Bibl. PP. Tom. vi. col. 77. E. Edit. 1575. Never was the admonition of Erasmus more suitable than it is at present. "Videtis jam inverti mundi scenam: aut deponenda est persona, aut agenda sunt sue cuique partes." Colloquia, p. 230. Londini, 1773.

THE END.

By the same Author,

A LETTER to the Rev. S. R. MAITLAND, on the
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THE following Sermon was preached without the least idea of its publication, which was requested immediately after the service of the Sunday evening on which it was pronounced. It appears as it was delivered, with the exception only of the extract from the Appendix to the Report of the Hibernian Society. The Author requests that his friends and congregation will receive it as a token of his affectionate good will. As to the sentiments it contains, they are, it is hoped, derived from the blessed word of God: the fears it expresses result from the invariable testimony of experience upon the subject to which they relate. The whole matter is referred to God, who "doeth according to his will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth," with fervent prayers that his blessing may accompany this effort to advance the glory of his name.

The Author of this Sermon feels gratified by the rapid sale of the first edition, and the demand which is still made for it. This reconciles him completely to its publication. He has added a few notes to explain and to confirm the assertions he has felt it necessary to make.

CAMBERWELL,
October 10, 1812.